



THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL THE RESCUE *begins* GOD AMONG US *Jesus Calls the First Disciples*

God is calling **you**. The question is how will **you** respond? We have the privilege of ‘listening in’ on His calls to others throughout the Bible. We have heard His call time after time. After Adam’s sin we read in **Genesis 3:9 (ESV)**⁹ *But*

the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” The Lord did not refuse to call Adam even after he sinned. Living in a world that was busy with sinning, God gave Noah a ‘warning call’ for the purpose of saving his family. Abraham accepted God’s call to journey to a place he had never been before. Jonah declined God’s call to go to Nineveh and wound up with a whale of a problem! While many would consider living on the ‘backside of a desert’ as being ‘out of range’, God called Moses from the remarkable ‘cell tower’ of a burning bush.

As we began our study of God Among Us, we hear God calling to the people through the ‘voice mail’ of His servant John the Baptist. The message said *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* **Matthew 3:2**

Now, we come to the point in the Bible – the point in history, when God is literally among us. And, what is He doing? The same thing He has always done – God is calling us with a message – a message God delivered in person through His Son - Jesus!

The temptation of Jesus has ended with Jesus successfully rebuking the tempter and His public ministry is beginning. John the Baptist has been imprisoned and Jesus takes up the call to repentance.

Read Matthew 4:17 (ESV)¹⁷ *From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

Jesus’ ‘in person’ message was the same as John’s. The phrase *kingdom of heaven* is found 32 times in Matthew’s Gospel. The phrase *kingdom of God* is found five times. Matthew wrote most specifically to Jewish readers. Out of reverence for the holy name of the LORD, the Jews would not mention ‘God’ but would substitute the word ‘heaven.’ Mark who wrote his gospel primarily to the Romans recorded the same call made by Jesus. We read in **Mark 1:15 (ESV)**¹⁵ .. *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”* Therefore,

it is clear that the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are one and the same. Most when they heard the message thought of a call to political revolution bringing in a kingdom on earth but that was not what Jesus had in mind. His kingdom begins with His spiritual reign in the lives of His people on earth. The Bible teaches His kingdom does not end! **Luke 1:33 (ESV)**³³ *and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.*”

Before we move on to Jesus’ call of His first disciples, let’s make sure we understand the meaning of Jesus’ call to repentance. True repentance is a “godly sorrow” for sin, an act of turning around and going in the opposite direction. Genuine repentance leads to a fundamental change in a person's relationship with God. Regret or remorse is the feeling people express when they get caught sinning. **Matthew 27:3 (ESV)**³ *Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders.* People like to debate whether Judas Iscariot’s remorse was enough to give him entrance into the kingdom of heaven. The way to answer the debate is to look at other scripture. Jesus said in **Matthew 26:24 (ESV)**²⁴ *The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.*” Jesus prayed regarding His disciples in **John 17:12 (ESV)**¹² *While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.* Judas’ sin was not so heinous that he could not have been forgiven. However, since Jesus said it would have been better if Judas had not been born, undoubtedly, Judas only experienced remorse and never came to the point of genuine repentance.

Jesus calls unlikely people to abandon all and follow Him.

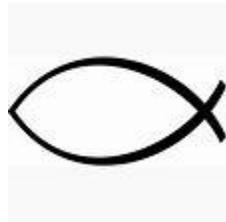
Read Matthew 4:18-22 (ESV)¹⁸ *While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.¹⁹ And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him.²¹ And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them.²² Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.*

If we only had Matthew’s gospel, we might conclude that the calling of these four fishermen resulted in an instantaneous response to the call of Jesus. However, **John 1** reveals how Andrew and most likely John, who never actually mentions himself by name in his gospel, initially answered the Lord’s call a few months earlier at Jesus’ baptism. John the Baptist encouraged them to follow Jesus and they did. We are told in the gospel of John that Andrew brought his brother Simon Peter to Jesus and most likely it was John who brought his brother James to Jesus.

After meeting with Jesus, they returned to their fishing business for a period of time. I consider the first call in John as their ‘salvation call’ and the call in Matthew as their ‘discipleship’ call.

Jesus had four fishermen in His group possibly more. Why would Jesus call so many fishermen to His side? I doubt their occupation had anything to do with why they were called. We know that God always looks into the heart of an individual not their occupation. Jesus did draw a parallel of what they **had been doing** and what they **would be doing**. He said: *Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*

Keep in mind that their fishing was not line-fishing, but net-fishing. Fishermen would either stand on the shore and repeatedly cast their nets into the water, or drop their nets from a boat. They did not use a lure and a line and wait for the fish to strike! The imagery has nothing to do with “hooking” the unbeliever with the gospel. It has everything to do with “throwing out the net.” The work of a fisherman involved much strain, long hours, and often little results.



The symbolism of fishing in Jesus' teaching about the kingdom was so strong that the Greek word for fish (ichthus) came to identify faith in Christ. Just be careful when you place that fish symbol on your vehicle that you don't drive like the devil! A net caught all types of fish. As His disciples, we must learn the lessons He taught, becoming His 21st century fishers of men and women – boys and girls by “casting out the nets” to bring all kinds of people to Him.

Jesus calls unpopular and unexpected people to follow Him.

Read Matthew 9:9-13 (ESV) ⁹ *As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him. ¹⁰ And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹ And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” ¹² But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”*

A similar event is recorded in **Luke 5** concerning a man named Levi. Bible scholars agree that Matthew and Levi are the same person. It was customary for a man to have two names. Evidently, Matthew like the disciples mentioned earlier had previous contact with Jesus. Matthew got up and followed Jesus leaving behind a lucrative career.

Tax collectors (publicans) in the Roman period obtained their jobs by bidding on them. They bid an amount of money to be collected in tolls. The collector's personal income was made by

adding a fee to the amount to be collected. Apparently, the Roman government did not care how large a fee the collector levied as long as the bill was paid. Thus, ancient tax collectors usually were despised by the citizens.

Matthew as a tax collector was skilled in keeping records. This would be helpful in what was his greatest contribution to the Christian cause, writing the Gospel of Matthew. In fact, it is possible that he knew shorthand for it was in use in those days. Consider this - Matthew and Luke both wrote accounts of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Luke's version is short and rougher in reading. Matthew's version is longer and smoother in reading. Herschel Hobbs says that he can almost see Matthew sitting off to one side recording word for word in shorthand what became one of the most beautiful and meaningful documents of all literature. God uses the skills of His people in many ways to further His kingdom. Matthew did not say, "I am going to take down this sermon in shorthand so that it will be read 2000 years from now." Matthew just used the talent God had given him.

When He visited Matthew, Jesus hurt His own reputation among the religious elites in order to reach out to those who were lost. Matthew became a bridge for Jesus' message to Matthew's past associates. We should not be afraid to reach out to people who are living in sin. God's message changes people! Sitting at Matthew's dinner table, Jesus may have broken some rules of 'polite society', but His presence there shows that He looked beyond culture to people's hearts. Whereas the Pharisees wrote people off simply because of their profession or their past, Jesus looked past all that and saw their need.

So what does the calling of Jesus' first disciples mean to us? It means that we too are called to be His disciples. **Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV)** ¹⁹ *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,* ²⁰ *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.* "Come and see! Then, go and tell!